

COMMUNITY DIPLOMACY: A VIABLE PARADIGM FOR CONFLICT MANAGEMENT AND RESOLUTION

Clement Chimezie Igbokwe, PhD

Department of History and International Relations

Abia State University, Uturu

chimbest@yahoo.com

&

Clara M. Austin Iwuoha, PhD

Department of Religious Studies

Imo State University, Owerri

ausiwuoha@yahoo.com

Abstract

In the present situation that the Nigerian society has found herself, it has become expedient that a fresh paradigm aimed at saving the country from anarchy and total security collapse be evolved. No doubt, the country is sitting at the moment on the keg of a gun powder which if not properly and diplomatically managed could explode, not just destroying the unity of the country, but will lead to wanton loss of lives and properties. The writers are worried by the heightened levels of insecurity, border conflicts and violent destructions of government installations. Community diplomacy remains a viable paradigm for conflict management and resolution, considering the levels of insecurity and destructions in most communities and state capitals in Nigeria. The writers observed that in the south east, for instance, conflicts and insecurity such as border communal conflicts, herdsmen attacks and violent destructions of government installations are on the increase. The writers, therefore, recommend that it has become imperative, in

view of the postulation by John Kennedy, that “Mankind must put an end to war, or war will put an end to mankind”.

Keywords: diplomacy, community diplomacy, conflict, conflict management, conflict resolution

Introduction

The levels of attacks and insecurity in Nigeria today are becoming so alarming that a new paradigm aimed at ameliorating this situation has become expedient. It will be devastating and catastrophic to allow herdsmen attacks and border community conflicts to degenerate from inter-community conflicts and escalate into a regional warfare which will not only lead to wanton loss of lives but will jeopardise economic activities and heighten political uncertainty. The role of traditional institutions in fostering alternative dispute resolution within and between her immediate neighbours cannot be overemphasised. As custodians of the people’s culture, it is incumbent on them to synergize with various stakeholders (youth organizations, women organisations and other relevant organizations) within the community with a view to unravelling the root cause (s) of any existing or future conflicts without which it will be apparently impossible to resolve such disputes.

Peace is not the absence of conflict but the presence of justice. No doubt, there cannot be a country or a community of absolute peace, except the community of the inhabitants of a graveyard, but creating an environment of justice guarantees relative peace. That said, it does not imply that peaceful coexistence is impossible, but it will be elusive when stakeholders are not “tying to try”, or are involved in the display of double standard informed by nepotism.

This paper is aimed at calling the attentions of political and traditional leaders towards a new paradigm of community diplomacy for ensuring a peaceful coexistence of all, irrespective of ethnic cleavages. Revolution, to a reasonable extent, may be a welcome

development towards a change, but no reasonable government will wait for it before taking necessary actions.

Overview of the Concept of Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the springboard and the framework upon which peaceful inter-governmental relationships rest. It is an established system conveniently accepted and adopted by peace-loving countries of the world to conduct official relations among them through the instrument of negotiation, dialogue, representation and other non-violent means. Diplomacy is an art, a craft and a profession, targeted at ensuring peaceful coexistence, and resolution of inevitable conflicts.

The word “diplomacy” is derived from the Greek word “diploma”. Diplomas are official documents that emanated from princes by which a privilege is conferred. It means something written on paper or parchment and folded. The term entered into the English language at the close of the eighteenth century when interstate intercourse between European states fully developed. (Collier Encyclopaedia, 242).

The term “diplomacy” has been perceived by renowned writers to connote different meanings. It is often used sometimes to convey an abstract quality or gift which means skill in the conduct of external relations. In this sense, diplomacy is seen as the “application of intelligence and tact to the conduct of official relations between governments of independent states, extending sometimes also to their business with vassal states (Satow, 1975:1). Another British authority writes that diplomacy “is an essential element in any reasonable relations between man and man and between nation and nation”. He further states that the essence of diplomacy is “common sense and charity applied to international relations” (Nicolson, 1952:14- 43). Diplomacy is also associated with the formulation and articulation of foreign policy and also the art of negotiations and representation.

These negotiations, according to Duchacek (1975), serve specific purposes and can be divided into four categories.

- (1) resolving a conflict of interest peacefully
- (2) preventing a clear and immediate danger of violent solution (or a risk of yielding to rival pressures.
- (3) restoring peace after a clash of interest had led to violence
- (4) establishing an atmosphere, framework, system or permanent organisation for the peaceful resolution of potential future conflicts.

Diplomacy, in recent times, has grown from bilateral talks to multilateral negotiations, summit and conference telephone conversations and the involvement of non-governmental organisations in diplomacy. In the case of community diplomacy, multilateral negotiations should be encouraged.

Diplomacy is the practice of conducting negotiations between representatives of states or groups with the intention to influence decisions and conducts through dialogue, negotiation and other non-violent means (*Encyclopedia Britannica*). Diplomacy is not usually a function or responsibility left in the hands of amateurs, but for the professional diplomats with the necessary skills of negotiation. It is germane that professional diplomats are employed to deploy their professional acumen to tackling topical issues.

Community Diplomacy

Community diplomacy is a new concept which the writers explain as the process by which community stakeholders are involved in conducting negotiation through dialogue in order to influence decisions with a view to minimizing conflicts, resolving conflicts and fostering greater and better understanding of one another.

Community diplomacy can serve as a framework for achieving order and reasonable peaceful coexistence. It is the oasis in the desert of lost

hope, created by irreconcilable conflict. Furthermore, community diplomacy is the hallmark of and the pivot on which all the chaos of present-day in various communities could be managed, hence fertilising the soil, for political, social and economic development.

The growth of diplomacy from the social contacts of the ancient Greek city-states of the Hellenic world, though lacking in a well-developed system of permanent representation, progressed with the extension of the Greek idea of ambassadorial immunity to encompass the immunity to the entourage, correspondence and equipment of the ambassador under the Roman diplomacy. The Roman empire, which crumbled under the pressure of the barbarian assault, produced the churchmen papacy who carried on a clerical diplomacy while utilising the many forms of secular politics during the medieval era of diplomacy (5th - 13 century). The Italian diplomacy of the era of renaissance to the early European diplomacy, after the peace of Westphalia of 1648, witnessed the emergence of the diplomat as a professional figure, a man of great political talent.

Modern diplomatic methods, practices and principles originated largely from European customs and is traceable to the 17th century. Beginning in the early 20th century, diplomacy became increasingly professionalized. Following the 1961 Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations which was ratified by most of the sovereign nations of the world, there was a provision of a framework for diplomatic procedures, methods and conduct. Most diplomacy is now carried out by accredited career and non-career diplomats through a dedicated political institution, usually with the support of staff and diplomatic infrastructure, such as consulates and embassies. Diplomacy is also conducted through other offices, such as envoys and ambassadors (Jay, 2014).

Forms of Diplomacy

- Gunboat diplomacy
- Public diplomacy

- Peer to peer diplomacy
- Migration diplomacy
- Preventive diplomacy
 - Quiet Diplomacy
 - Soft Power, etc.

For the purpose of this paper, we will confine our interest to three out of the various forms of diplomacy. The choice of the three is informed by the fact that we are discussing community diplomacy with reference to the border conflicts and attacks in the communities in south east.

Preventive Diplomacy

Preventive diplomacy is carried out through quiet means, as opposed to “gun-boat diplomacy”, which is backed by the threat of force, or “public diplomacy”, which makes use of publicity. It is also understood that circumstances may exist in which the consensual use of force (notably preventive deployment) might be welcomed by parties to a conflict with a view to achieving the stabilization necessary for diplomacy and related political processes to proceed. This is to be distinguished from the use of persuasion, influence, and other non-coercive approaches explored below.

Preventive diplomacy, from an expert viewpoint, is the range of peaceful dispute resolution approaches mentioned in Article 33 of the UN Charter, with emphasis on the pacific settlement of disputes when applied before a dispute crosses the threshold to armed conflict. Communities should not allow their conflicts to escalate to the point of armed struggle; hence, preventive diplomacy is highly recommended. It may take many forms, with different means employed. One of such forms of diplomacy which may be brought to bear to prevent violent conflict or to prevent its recurrence is “quiet diplomacy.”

Quiet Diplomacy

Also known as the "softly softly" approach, quiet diplomacy is the attempt to influence the behaviour of another state through secret negotiations or by refraining from taking a specific action (Nye, 2006). This method is often employed by states that lack alternative means to influence the target government, or that seek to avoid certain outcomes. For example, this form of diplomacy worked in South Africa when it engaged in quiet diplomacy with neighbouring Zimbabwe to avoid appearing as bullish and subsequently engendering a hostile response. This approach can also be employed in conflicts within our area of study.

Soft Power

Soft power, also referred to as "hearts and minds diplomacy", was defined by Joseph Nye (2006) as the cultivation of relationships, respect, or even admiration from others in order to gain influence, as opposed to more coercive approaches. Often and incorrectly confused with the practice of official diplomacy, soft power refers to non-state, culturally attractive factors that may predispose people to sympathize with a foreign culture based on affinity for its products, such as their cultural entertainments, schools and music (Dlamini, 2002). A community soft power can come from three resources: its culture (in places where it is attractive to others), its political values and economic interest.

Causes of Conflict

An attempt will be made at this juncture to briefly define conflict before we can examine its possible causes. Conflict can be defined as a situation in which parties are aware of the incompatibility of potential future positions and in which each party wishes to occupy a position which is incompatible with the wishes of the other.

Larfela (1988) defines conflict as: "Part of the competition process that is basic to the survival and successful evolution of the species, homosapiens and to his search for new and better ways to cope with

limited resources and stress from environmental change.”As human beings, we are a community of homosapiens with divergent but conflicting interests; hence, conflict arises when there is struggle or contest between people with opposing needs, ideas, beliefs, values, or goals. There are divergent views opined by scholars explaining the reason why conflicts inevitably occur. According to John Rourke (1983), conflicts are caused by a multiple of factors which could be better understood when classified into three levels of analyses, namely: system, state and individual levels of analyses.

System Level Analysis

At this level, it is believed that conflicts or wars are caused by a number of factors that are related to the nature and structure of world’s political system. This is due to the uneven distribution of power or the nature of global power structure resulting in arms race in order to achieve balance of power.

State Level Analysis

Watt (1959) argues that causes of conflict at this level are attributed to economic and political factors. At this level, what comes to mind are the internal political dynamic of countries, the character of the nation, economic factors, especially where there is population expansion, modernization, urbanization, nationalism in the form of ethnocentricisms, identified differentials and elite conflicts. A typical example of this level of analysis is the “Unholy matrimony and unfortunate mistake” that gave birth to the configuration we all call Nigeria in 1914 and the attendant ethnocentricisms, imbalances, marginalisation and deprivations associated with it.

Individual Level Analysis

Watts further explains that the root causes of conflict and war are traceable to the nature of human beings which, in his view, is proud, selfish, power-crazed, stupid and vicious. Drawing from this analysis, conflict arises either due to the character of the individual or based on the inherent nature of species. Such conflict emanates over matters of

territoriality than human aggression and individually or collectively; such conflicts can stem from stress, anxiety or frustration. For example, the conflict in the Niger Delta is as a result of frustration and deprivation - resulting in aggression as a means to draw attention to many years of systemic and institutionalised injustice. Rourke (1993) observes that the inability of leaders to perceive events objectively is caused by the factors that may be inherent in human beings.

Conflict Resolution Mechanism

In international relations, there are various conflict resolution approaches which include, but not limited to the following: mediation, negotiation, arbitration, adjudication, conciliation, counselling, peacekeeping, etc. For the purpose of this paper, three of the basic approaches will be discussed.

Mediation

Mediation is a voluntary process in which an impartial person (as mediator) helps to provide channels of communication and promotes reconciliation between the conflicting parties. Mediation is the most common form of conflict resolution. It involves an independent and impartial person helping individuals or groups reach a solution that is acceptable to the parties. Mediation is not prescriptive. It helps the parties involved to make progress in resolving their differences. It does not make judgments or determine outcomes. Success of mediation depends on the level of trust of both parties on the mediator.

Such a mediator must be prepared to cajole disputing parties into accepting proposals aimed at reaching a mutually acceptable agreement. It is imperative to note that the mediators must be accepted by the disputing parties. He or she must possess the required skills, capacity and propensity to bring to bear the wealth of experiences into an amicable resolution of conflict.

Negotiation

Direct negotiation between parties to a dispute is the most natural method of dispute settlement. It involves discussions among two or more people with the aim of reaching an agreement. It implies a formal meeting between opposing factions in which attempts are made to arrive at an agreement through discussions and compromises. When negotiating parties try to persuade each other to see issues their own way, the intention is to meet certain interests or needs through a collaborative and peaceful manner.

Adjudication and Arbitration

These are the most rigid and often the least satisfactory approaches to resolving conflicts. Both approaches are similar as they involve settlement through an independent legal tribunal. These mechanisms are applicable to settlement of international disputes - relying on international law.

It is imperative to state categorically that lengthy courtroom battles possibly resulting in the victory of one's opponent cannot amicably resolve any conflict; rather, whatever pseudo peace that may have been achieved through the court process is a time bomb in waiting.

Diplomacy as a Viable Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Diplomacy and war are two sides of the same coin – they are bed mates, but are no friends. Where one stops at its daily activities, the other takes over. Where diplomacy stops, war takes over, which implies untying with the teeth the diplomatic nut that has refused to yield to the tongue. The need for co-operation, peaceful coexistence and dialogue makes the preference of diplomacy to confrontation an overriding desire of the present age. It is a viable option that is incomparable to the horror and terror associated with war. Differences in religion, ideology, language, values, and interests, politics and political inclinations and economic institutions vary widely between people of divergent backgrounds and origins and they supply

abundant fuel for intractable conflicts. Conflicts arising there from, though intractable and herculean to resolve, can however be managed, such that the resort to the use of force to reconcile them becomes both unnecessary and an unacceptable option. This paper on community diplomacy was conceived with a view to exploring the usefulness of diplomacy as a means for resolving and reconciling every form of conflict, irrespective of complexities.

Diplomacy, to the layman, means cunning or crookedness, but it is simply the act of bargaining, which involves a roundtable negotiation with the intention of reconciling aggrieved persons, groups, communities or states. Diplomacy is a means to an end, but might not be an end in itself, not until disputing parties are willing to compromise and accommodate some of the interests of the opponent.

Humanity must embrace early diplomatic settlement of conflicts before such a conflict transmutes into an arm duel. This has become germane in view of the fact that war as an instrument of national policy became outlawed, following the Kellogg Briand Pact of 1928, to give way for diplomatic settlement of disputes.

In strategic studies, we learnt that, “*Si vis pacem para bellum*” (If you want peace, prepare for war). But for the loss of human lives and destruction of properties associated with war, this paper will paraphrase this statement to read: “*Si vis pacem para pacem*” (if you want peace, prepare for peace). Furthermore, “*Si vis bellum para bellum*” (if you want war, prepare for war). This paper is not in any way advocating for war as a means to settling disputes, but like the Igbo adage that states “*Agha eyiri eyi anaghi eri nwa ngworo*” “*Ma o ji oso agbakuru ogu amaghi n’ogu bu onwu*”. The worst thing that can happen to anybody, group or community is to hurry into a war without adequate preparations. It will amount to a colossal and monumental loss of the highest magnitude. We think that these postulations will serve a note of inviolable and unavoidable warning to war mongers.

Furthermore, it also calls on all to be careful in articulating who an enemy is; take some time to study your enemy when identified, and do not strike until you consider it fit to do so.

Furthermore, Sun Tzu states:

If your enemy is secure at all points, be prepared for him. If he is in superior strength, evade him. If your opponent is temperamental, seek to irritate him. Pretend to be weak, that he may grow arrogant. If he is taking his ease, give him no rest. If his forces are united, separate them. If sovereign and subject are in accord, put division between them. Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

The Latin adage, *Si vis pacem, para bellum* “If you want peace, prepare for war”, should be discouraged because war has never done any nation any good; no wonder this submission by a former Israeli President, Shimon Perez: “Good neighbours are better than good guns”. War does not come with any form of palatability, but the horror of terror it unleashes on its victims results in quantum loss of beloved ones and infrastructure.

History, over time, has taught the human race that war in contemporary times is not a sustainable option to conflict resolution. Taking for granted even the weakest enemy can turn to be the worst nightmare to contain. It is one thing to win a war, but winning the peace often proves elusive. The United States of America in 2001 went to war in Afghanistan, believing it to be an easy task to smoke Osama Bin Laden out of the caves of Afghanistan; but irrespective of her superior firepower and sophisticated military strategies, it took her several years to realize that her target was hibernating safely in Pakistan - the air base for the “coalition of the willing” from where they launched their attack. Suffice to observe that the war several years after is still not over since the first bomb was dropped. The

American government is currently negotiating with the Taliban and tactically withdrawing their military from Afghanistan. The same scenario played out in Iraq in 2003, and until date, the war is far from over as the Isis terrorist organisation has hijacked the vacuum created by the exit of Saddam Hussein and has taken over most of the regions of Iraq, forcing America (the policeman of the world) to take to the option of pulling out her military from Iraq. There may not be enough time to describe the situation in Libya, since the destabilisation orchestrated by the America-led NATO forces which eventually led to the killing of Muammar Gaddafi. Since this incident, Libya has witnessed pockets of skirmishes and volatile arm duels, and more recent is the war between forces loyal to the Libyan government and the Khalifa Haftar forces.

The lesson to be learnt from all the narratives above is that war is an enemy of humankind because ‘*elelia nwa ite ya gbonyuo oku* (nobody no matter how weak should be taken for granted). Basically, therefore, this paper would like to advocate a diplomatic resolution of conflicts which galvanizes into peaceful relations between communities.

Recommendations

The under-listed recommendations are not exhaustive, but will, to a large extent, help individuals or groups objectively seeking a peaceful path to conflict resolution.

- Parties to a conflict should try to create an environment of trust.
- Disputants must develop the willingness to compromise.
- Both parties can exchange offers.
- Both parties should develop and imbibe objective and positive attitudes which are necessary to understanding the needs of each other.

- A win-lose approach to negotiations may not suffice in conflict management, but a win-win approach, though depending on the nature of the conflict.
- Both parties should strive towards arriving at mutual benefits.
- It is necessary to involve impartial and skilled third parties when the disputants are unable to handle the conflict.
- The major sources of conflict in Africa may not be too distant from issues of boundary dispute, chieftaincy/ezeship tussle, family property/inheritance, murder or poisoning, and matrimonial fall-outs. In resolving these kinds of conflicts, the principles of equity and justice, which are entrenched in African customs and traditions, should apply.
- The traditional African system of government was an open and inclusive system, where all people could participate in the decision-making process. While the West practised representative democracy, Africans practised participatory democracy, in which decisions were taken by consensus at village meetings. In the management of conflicts, this major attribute of African governmental system must be evoked.
- The Igbo traditional institutions for conflict resolution include: the family, Amala (council of elders), Okpara system (eldest male), Umuanna (clan), Umuada (female born in a town but married out), age grades, Ohanaeze (assembly of the people and the king), and agbara (local deities or oracles). The above-mentioned institutions should be revived with a view to maximizing the roles they play in conflict management.

Conclusion

Long before the advent of colonialism in Africa, and beyond slave trade, African societies had afro-institutional mechanisms as well as cultural sources to uphold the values of peace, tolerance, solidarity and respect for one another. These structures were responsible for peace education, confidence-building, peacemaking, peace-building, conflict monitoring, conflict prevention, conflict management and conflict resolution. If these mechanisms were effective in handling and managing conflicts among the people, it was largely because they reflected the socio-political orientation of the African people, addressing all the social, political and economic conflicts among a people who lived a communal way of life. Thus, it was customary as well as common currency for people sitting down informally to discuss and agree on important issues. This no doubt will also help in conflict resolution, when people sit down to discuss their differences with a view to arriving at a peaceful reconciliation.

The United Nations recognizes the importance of diplomacy when it enshrined in article 33 of its charter that parties to any dispute should first of all seek solutions by negotiation, enquiry, mediation, conciliation, arbitration, judicial settlement, resort to regional agencies or arrangement or other peaceful means of their choice. Each of the processes has different steps and outcomes; while some are more effective, some are more desirable for a particular conflict. The UN charter recommends three basic procedures: direct negotiation among the conflicting parties, mediation, conciliation and arbitration. Preference to early diplomatic solutions to judicial settlement is highly recommended by these presenters.

Peace is not the absence of war but the presence of justice. Conflict is an inevitable functional part of any society which cannot be wished away. The earlier we realize that there is no community or society where absolute peace is resident, the better we adjust to accommodate our differences and subsequently imbibe peaceful mechanisms

towards addressing our inevitable incompatibilities. Having said this, all hands must be on deck; peace is the responsibility of us all - fathers, mothers, and most importantly the youths. Time has come to match words with commensurate actions. We must try to live in peace and harmony with our neighbours. Diplomacy remains a viable option in conflict resolution and has no substitute except war.

References

- Address of Foreign Minister Shimon Peres to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Strasbourg, 23 January 2002 Retrieved from <https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/PressRoom/2002/Pages/Address%20of%20Foreign%20Minister%20Shimon%20Peres%20to%20the%20Pa.aspx>
- Duchacek Ivo D (1975) *Nations and men: An Introduction to International Politics*. Illinois: Dryden Press.
- “Diplomacy/Nature, Purpose, History & Practice”. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Retrieved 30 Nov. 2020.
- Jay, Winter ed. (2014). "The Diplomats" *The Cambridge History of the First World War: Volume II: The State* vol. 2 p 68.
- John Rourke (1993). *Presidential Wars and American Democracy; Rally Round the Chief*. New York: Paragon House.
- Kenneth N. Waltz (1959). *Man, the State and War*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Kuseni Dlamini, (2002) “Is Quiet Diplomacy an Effective Conflict Resolution Strategy”? *SA Yearbook of International Affairs*, 2002, pp. 171-72.
- Larfela, R.A. (1988) "Interdepartmental Conflict" in *IPM Manpower Journal*, pp. 29-32. Pretoria, Volume 2.
- Nicolson, Harold (1952) *Diplomacy*. London: Oxford University Press
- Nye, Joseph (2006). “Think Again: Soft Power”. *Foreign Policy*. Retrieved 17 December, 2020.
- Satow, E (1975) *A Guide to Diplomatic Practise*. London: Longman.

*Community Diplomacy: A Viable Paradigm For Conflict Management And
Resolution*

*Edited by: Ikechukwu Anthony KANU, PhD,
Jimoh BAKARE, PhD, Chiugo Catherine KANU, PhD*